



February 5, 2020

The Honorable Alan Lowenthal
Chairman of the U.S. House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources
108 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Lowenthal:

We are writing to express our opposition to H.R. 5598, the “Boundary Waters Wilderness Protection and Pollution Prevention Act.” As representatives of the coalition Jobs for Minnesotans, the industry association MiningMinnesota and the Range Association of Municipalities and Schools (RAMS), we speak for the people of Minnesota most directly impacted by this legislation. If enacted into law, this legislation would close access to one of the largest undeveloped copper, nickel, cobalt and platinum group metal deposits in the world without due process and with devastating effects on the economic and social well-being of northeastern Minnesota.

The bill would also harm national economic and security interests by locking up domestic sources of minerals critical to manufacturing, economic growth and defense. Its passage would make us even more reliant on foreign sources for these critical minerals. Finally, it would undermine the authority and credibility of the federal environmental review and permitting process under the National Environmental Policy Act by bypassing it entirely for copper-nickel-platinum group mining proposals. The bill makes the baseless assumption that a proposal could somehow move forward without meeting strict legal standards for protecting our air, land and water.

The economic benefits from just one mining project affected by this bill—the proposed Twin Metals Minnesota underground mine near Ely—are significant: thousands of direct, well-paying jobs, twice as many in spinoff industry jobs and billions of dollars for K-12 education across the state of Minnesota. The emerging copper-nickel mining industry represents an investment in the future well-being of our state and nation—an investment clearly jeopardized by the draconian, discriminatory provisions of this bill.

It’s worth noting the economic disparities between the bill’s Minnesota-based co-signers and the actual region it impacts. Constituents in Ramsey and Hennepin counties represented by Reps. McCollum and Phillips respectively enjoy incomes averaging \$10,000 to \$20,000 higher than residents of St. Louis County and Lake County where these mineral deposits exist, according to the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development. All Minnesotans deserve the right to explore economic opportunities most relevant to their region while also protecting the environment.



As you're aware, in 1950 Congress took action to make land available for mineral exploration and development within the Superior National Forest. In 1978, Congress passed the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness Act. It was a compromise that prohibited mining within the 1.1-million-acre Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness and surrounding buffer zones, while allowing authorized mining in the Superior National Forest on nearby lands where mining was deemed a desired activity.

H.R. 5598 would overturn that historic compromise, arbitrarily replacing it with an outright ban on copper-nickel mining on land where mining remains an officially designated desired use, while continuing to allow other forms of mining.

Additionally, key elements of the emerging green economy—electric batteries, wind turbines, solar panels, etc.—require ample supplies of copper, nickel, and platinum group metals. These minerals are necessary for electric and hybrid vehicles manufactured in the United States by companies such as Tesla, Toyota and General Motors. Northeastern Minnesota contains approximately 95% of the known U.S. nickel supply and about a third of the U.S. copper supply. It is paramount for the United States to have access to a secure, domestic source of nickel, which is critical to U.S. manufacturing, infrastructure and technology. Relying on foreign countries for critical minerals threatens U.S. economic security and our leadership in technology and innovation.

Rather than advancing legislation that could have serious economic and security consequences, policymakers should have trust in and help facilitate the legal, well-established environmental review and permitting process for projects that will enable the United States to reduce its dependence on foreign sources of critical minerals. Any proposed projects must of course meet stringent state and federal standards in order to move forward. Mining proponents should not be deprived of the opportunity to prove their ability to operate lawfully, safely and responsibly. Agencies long entrusted with orderly, science-based regulatory review under the law should not be supplanted by the forces of partisanship.

We ask you to hear our voices and refrain from moving H.R. 5598 forward and continue to allow all mining projects, including copper, nickel and platinum group metals mining projects, to follow the established, transparent, predictable and fair environmental review process long established under federal and state laws.

Sincerely,

Nancy Norr
Board Chair
Jobs for Minnesotans

Frank Ongaro
Executive Director
Mining Minnesota

Steve Giorgi
Executive Director



*Range Association of
Municipalities and Schools*

Jobs for Minnesotans, a coalition representing business, labor and communities, supports statewide opportunities for prosperity and middle-class jobs from sustainable natural resource development in Minnesota. The organization is committed to the principle that our state can preserve both job opportunities and the environment for future generations. Jobs for Minnesotans was co-founded in 2012 by the Minnesota Building and Construction Trades Council representing 55,000 workers and the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce representing 2,300 companies and 500,000 employees.

MiningMinnesota is an industrial trade organization made up of all nonferrous exploration and mineral development companies in Minnesota, along with approximately 100 supplier and vendor businesses, all committed to sustainable and environmentally responsible copper-nickel and PGM mineral development and mining in Minnesota.

Range Association of Municipalities and Schools (RAMS) represents more than 78,000 residents and 57 public sector units of government, including 27 cities, 16 public school districts and 14 townships, in the 13,000 square mile Taconite Assistance Area (TAA) of northeast Minnesota. As an organization, RAMS has represented the interests of the Iron Range region for over 80 years.

Attachments:

- Open letter from 60 Minnesota organizations and 18 Northeast Minnesota Mayors supporting Twin Metals Minnesota entering the regulatory process
- *Star Tribune* editorial counterpoint from Frank Ongaro, MiningMinnesota

CC: Members of the U.S. House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources:

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